



### Expert Panel Examines Video from Turkey Hatchery

The Center for Food Integrity's (CFI) Animal Care Review Panel has examined undercover video obtained at a turkey hatchery. CFI created the video review program to engage recognized animal care specialists to examine video and provide expert perspectives for food retailers, the poultry industry and the media.

This expert panel was comprised of Dr. Patricia Hester, Purdue University; Dr. Charles Hofacre, University of Georgia; and Dr. Yvonne Vizzier Thaxton, University of Arkansas.

In the video, farm employees are seen working with newly-hatched turkeys, referred to as "poults."

#### **Dr. Thaxton**

*"Eggs that are to be hatched into tomorrow's turkeys are placed in incubators until the time of hatch. After hatch, the poults are first separated from the remaining egg shells and any unhatched eggs. They are then transferred to a conveyor so that those that have been damaged or were deformed can be removed for humane euthanization. At this very young age, virtually all injuries and deformities will lead to death, so an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) approved method of euthanasia is performed to stop further pain or long-term suffering. The healthy birds are prepared to move to the farm."*

#### **Dr. Hofacre**

*"This hatchery, in my opinion, is following proper guidelines for humane handling and euthanasia of turkey poults and unhatched eggs.*

*"It is natural for turkeys to often peck each other, which can result in severe injuries. To prevent this, there is a painless process called 'infrared beak treatment.' Since turkeys raised inside a barn don't have to fight off predators they don't really need that sharp tip of their beak. The beak treatment is taking place in the segment of the video where the poults have their heads in a mask and a red light can be seen. The infrared light prevents the tip of the beak from growing, so in about one week that sharp tip falls off.*

*"The AVMA has many scientifically-proven methods for euthanizing day-old poults and unhatched eggs. The hatchery in which this video was taken is actually using two of those methods, when one would have been a humane method of euthanasia. If placed on a farm, poults with obvious birth defects would suffer and die slowly, so the hatchery workers are separating those with defects by hand into boxes seen in the video marked as 'inedible' (after all, we do raise turkeys as food for people). Poults from a box like this are later seen in the plastic bags being euthanized with CO2 gas, an AVMA-approved method. The unhatched eggs, if there are any live embryos inside, and shells from the hatched poults are euthanized by a macerator, which is the machine seen in the video into which workers are pouring a hatch basket. This is a very rapid and painless method of euthanizing unhatched poults and is also approved by the AVMA."*

#### **Dr. Hester**

*"Although euthanasia of hatchlings is never pleasant to experience, it is necessary to humanely put down poults when they are not likely to recover or are in distress and in pain. Poultry are similar to other species of the animal kingdom in*



*that a very small percentage of hatchlings will unfortunately emerge from the shell with genetic defects (e.g., enlarged eye seen in the video), and they must be euthanized because of the likelihood that they cannot be treated, will not recover, and could be in pain or distress. A small percentage of poults hatch with infected yolk sacs or other infections and they, too, must be euthanized for reasons already mentioned and to prevent transmission of disease to the healthy hatchlings.”*

**Dr. Thaxton**

*“The practices shown in this video are normal and within guidelines for humane handling. The ‘dangling’ of the poults for beak treatment would appear to the untrained eye to be harming the birds. The reality is this system was developed to improve the operation so as to minimize long-term stress on these young birds as they grow to maturity.*

*“Deformed poults and those damaged by other birds must be euthanized in a timely manner. This is done to stop suffering, which would continue over time to an early death. To do this, groups are commonly collected over a period of a very few minutes and placed in special boxes (such as the one seen in the video labeled ‘inedible’) to separate them from the healthy poults. The euthanization techniques seen in the video are AVMA-approved, humane methods. The extent of injury and the act of euthanizing are not pleasant to watch.”*

**Animal Care Review Panel program**

Video investigations at livestock and poultry farms have heightened public attention on animal care issues. In an effort to foster a more balanced conversation and to provide credible feedback to promote continuous improvement in farm animal care, CFI created the Animal Care Review Panel program.

The Panel operates independently. Its reviews, assessments, recommendations and reports will not be submitted to the poultry industry for review or approval. CFI’s only role is to facilitate the review process and release the panel’s findings.

**About the Experts**

**Dr. Patricia Hester  
Purdue University**

Dr. Hester has been on the Purdue University faculty since December 1976. Her B.S. in Poultry Science and Ph.D. in Poultry Physiology are from North Carolina State University. Dr. Hester has been a member of the United Egg Producer’s scientific advisory committee on animal welfare since its inception in 1998 and currently serves as chair. Dr. Hester served as President of the Poultry Science Association (PSA) in 2005, was named a PSA Fellow in 2009 and received the Poultry Welfare Research Award in 2010. In 2009, she received the North Carolina State University Distinguished Alumni Award from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

**Dr. Yvonne Vizzier Thaxton  
Professor, Director, Center for Food Animal Well-Being  
University of Arkansas**



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Dr. Thaxton received her M.S. in Biological Sciences from Mississippi University for Women and her Ph.D. in Poultry Pathology from Auburn University. She currently is Professor and Director at the Center for Food Animal Well-Being at the University of Arkansas and Professor Emeritus at Mississippi State University. From 1992 to 2012, she held a variety of positions with Mississippi State University including Interim Head of the Department of Poultry Science. She previously worked in private industry as a microbiologist including Vice President of Science and Quality Assurance at Marshall Durbin Foods. Dr. Thaxton is a past president of the Southern Poultry Science Society and the American Poultry Historical Society and is a former member of the American Society of Microbiology and several other professional organizations.

**Dr. Charles L. Hofacre**

**Professor, Director of Clinical Services**

**Department of Avian Medicine**

**College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Georgia**

Dr. Hofacre received his M.S. and D.V.M. from Ohio State University and his Ph.D. from the University of Georgia where he joined the College of Veterinary Medicine in 2003. He previously was Manager of Professional Services at Bayer Animal Health and previously worked for a broiler breeder genetics company and a turkey company.

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The Center for Food Integrity is a not-for-profit organization established to build consumer trust and confidence in today's food system. Our members, who represent every segment of the food system, are committed to providing accurate information and addressing important issues among all food system stakeholders. The Center does not lobby or advocate for individual food companies or brands. For more information, visit [www.foodintegrity.org](http://www.foodintegrity.org).